DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 446 EC 161 183

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TITLE Saturday Programs for the Gifted: An Alternative for Parent Advocacy Groups.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Enrichment; *Gifted; *Parent Role; *Program Development; *Weekend Programs

ABSTRACT

Saturday enrichment programs are viable options for gifted children who are not served in the public schools. Because such programs are not dependent on schools or state departments for funding, or for initiation, Saturday programs can be successfully operated by parent and other advocacy groups. Guidelines for considering such programs focus on analyzing facilities and resources (including staff, publicity, and tuition considerations), developing an identification plan and program format (whether extended learning or one-shot approaches), capitalizing on procedures already in use in other Saturday programs, monitoring program results, and maintaining information on the program's teachers. (CL)

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SATURDAY PROGRAMS FOR THE GIFTED:

AN ALTERNATIVE FOR PARENT ADVOCACY GROUPS

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What is more appealing than Saturday morning cartoons and sleeping in late? What viable alternatives to weekend TV are available to children during their "time-off" from school? Some children prefer to attend interesting and exciting special classes for the gifted during the prime time cartoon hours on Saturday mornings. The success of a number of these efforts around the country indicates that Saturday programs are able to meet some of the needs of bright children (Karnes and Gregory, 1980). They offer gifted children experience in relating intellectually, artistically, and emotionally with others like themselves. Saturday programs expose students to a variety of fields of study, arts, and occupations and provide them with a large fund of information about diverse topics. Unfettered by a prescribed school curriculum, Saturday programs are able to meet the need gifted children have for activities at an appropriate level and pace (Feldhusen and Wyman, 1980; Feldhusen and Sokol, 1982).

Such programs tend to take the form of a series of mini-courses generally not available in the regularly scheduled school day. This may mean offering foreign language classes to lower elementary students, excursions into lesser known areas of science such as chromatography to seventh and eighth grade students or computer programming courses for third graders (Feldhusen and Wyman, 1980). In addition to academic courses, these programs may include offerings in the fine arts and indepth exposure to selected careers and

professions. The listing of course offerings is limited only by the organizer's imagination and the availability of excellent teachers.

Whether the programs focus on academics, creative arts, or career awareness and the professions, they have commonality. They are a viable alternative in communities whose schools do not provide for their gifted; and in the more fortunate areas, they are a welcome supplement to existing programs within the school. Even when associated with supportive districts, as is the case in many areas, Saturday programs are in a sense separate from public schools. They need not be dependent on schools or state departments for their funding, their initiation, or their continued success. Therefore, Saturday programs are an area in which concerned parents of the gifted can become involved.

One does not have to wait to be appointed as a parent representative on a school planning committee to be active in providing opportunities for one's gifted children. Parent and other advocacy groups have successfully initiated and administered Saturday programs for years (Ginsberg, 1978).

Parent groups wishing to develop a Saturday program should consider the following guidelines (Robinson, 1983). First, the group should consider its resources. What physical facilities are available? Can classes be held in a school building, on a campus, or in a public institution like a museum? Availability of suitable rooms for holding classes will in part determine what form the program will take. Who will be willing to serve as instructors? Saturday programs have successfully used public school personnel, university faculty, practicing professionals, and parents as

teachers. The selection of the teachers and their special strengths and interests shapes the course offerings of a program. What access does the parent group have to clerical help? The promotional activities, processing of applications, and handling of a mailing list require many hours of secretarial time. What avenues for reaching gifted children does the group have? Some Saturday programs rely on schools to recommend students. Others may advertise through commercial media. Some parent groups elect to serve the children of group members. Still others may maintain a mailing list to children who have participated in school programs for the gifted. What funds does the parent group have at its disposal? A budget should be drawn up which accounts for teacher remuneration, supplies, and any rental fees necessary. With expenses in mind, the parent group can determine the amount of tuition necessary in order to cover costs.

In addition to considering its resources, the parent group should formulate an identification plan and the format for the program they wish to organize. Some groups have based their plans on state or school district guidelines of programs for the gifted (Ginsberg, 1978). Using information from more than one source is recommended. For example, children may be considered eligible if they are recommended in writing by classroom teachers and parents or have above average achievement or ability scores. The identification plan and the format should be considered simultaneously.

There are a number of formats for parent groups to consider as they undertake the planning and execution of this type of program. Some Saturday programs are a one-shot extravaganza in which students attend a half-day or full-day of special workshops. Frequently

institutions or educational facilities like museums, historical societies, planetariums, or aquariums may be used as a basis for exciting activities organized around a theme. Examples of this kind of opportunity were the initial Saturday activities planned at the Pacific Science Center in Seattle, Washington. Organized by the Northwest Gifted Child Association, a parent organization, the first of these single Saturday offerings included small group mini-classes for children and informative meetings and panels for parents.

In contrast, other Saturday programs offer courses over an extended period of time. The Super Saturday program at Purdue University operates eight to ten week sessions during the Fall and Spring semesters (Feldhusen and Wyman, 1980). It is a series of courses for students in preschool through grade twelve. The emphasis is on academic course offerings, particularly in the areas of science, mathematices, and computer science but foreign language and art classes also draw substantial enrollments. Similarly, the long-running Saturday Workshop organized by the Gifted Child Society in New Jersey offers mini-courses for extended sessions (Ginsberg, 1978). The Workshop uses the facilities of the public school, but it is independently administered. Tuition paid by the parents of children enrolled in the classes and a yearly family membership fee of the Society support the program.

Thirdly, parent groups should capitalize on procedures developed by already established Saturday programs. A great deal of time is saved by adapting the forms and procedures used by other programs. By contacting existing programs and requesting brochures and examples of their paper work, the group will have more time to spend on

other organizational concerns. A file should be established to accommodate the paper work generated by the program and to keep records on the participating children. The use of microcomputer time donated by a parent home computer owner will help eliminate the mushrooming piles of papers, forms, and lists of addresses. With the use of a word processing software package, all important filed information can be stored on a disc.

Fourthly, an effort should be made to monitor the results of the program in some way. The group should make available simple, single page evaluation forms to be filled out by children and their parents at the conclusion of the program. By asking participants what they like best and least about the program, inprovements can be made in operations for the next sessions.

Finally, a file of information should be kept on the teachers in the Saturday program. The continued success of a program depends upon securing superior instructors who are willing to develop new and intriguing courses for the children. Many programs encourage teachers to assist an experienced Saturday instructor for one session before planning their own course. Maintaining current addresses, phone numbers, and a schedule of availability for these people makes the planning of a session more expedient. One of the most important tasks undertaken by a parent group planning a Saturday program is locating experienced and innovative instructors who are willing to give their time on weekend mornings.

In summary, then, the guidelines parent groups may want to consider when establishing a Saturday program are:

1. Consider the resources in the community available to the group.

2. With the resources in mind, develop an identification plan and select a format for the program.

3. Adapt the paper work and record keeping systems used by established Saturday programs.

4. Through simple evaluation, monitor the success and areas in which the program should be improved.

5. Focus much of the group's effort on locating and retaining enthusiastic teachers willing to design innovative courses for the program.

Following these guidelines will assist parents in planning a successful Saturday program. There are several characteristics of these programs which make them especially appealing to organized parent groups. First, the concept of the Saturday program is quite exportable. Currently operating Saturday programs have been organized by public schools, universities, and parent groups. In some areas, the program may be a cooperative venture between school and parent groups, parent group and university, or school and university. In other areas, one agency takes full responsibility for organizing and running the program. The important point is that whatever its administrative setting, a program which can be run successfully by several different groups or institutions has an excellent chance of meeting the needs of gifted students in many communities. Saturday programs can be organized and operated by any group with enthusiasm and some organizational skill.

Secondly, in addition to the diversity of the organizing group, Saturday programs are equally successful in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Many take place in large urban areas where special

facilities and an extensive pool of instructors make the possibilities endless. Others capitalize on the opportunities for laboratories, computer facilities, TV equipment, auditoriums available in universities or large school systems. However, in addition to communities rich in physical facilities and with large student populations, there are successful Saturday programs in more remote areas as well. As the success of the Catskill Saturday Seminars indicates, programs for the gifted can flourish in rural areas with towns of less than two thousand residents (Porter, 1978).

Thirdly, with the increased fiscal uncertainty threatening public and private schools, Saturday programs have proved themselves to be economically viable. In many cases, they are self-supporting and therefore do not face the threat of cuts in school funding. With access to already established building facilities and by charging a moderate tuition fee, Saturday programs may be able to survive the current modest interest and lack of financial support of educational services to gifted children.

For concerned parents in communities with few or no school options for their gifted children, the Saturday program becomes an outlet for both parent and child. Children profit from attending these programs in which some of their needs as able learners are met. Parents who might otherwise be frustrated by the lack of opportunities for their child can take control of the situation by organizing and operating a Saturday program for the gifted.

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*The Saturday morning program for gifted youngsters at Purdue University is sponsored by the Gifted Education Resource Institute. The Director of the Institute is Dr. John F. Feldhusen. Requests for further information should be directed to the Institute at West Lafayette, Indiana.

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